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IMPARTIAL
REFLECTIONS,

ON THE
CONDUCT OF THE MANAGERS,
AND
MERITS OF SOME OF THE PERFORMERS
OF THE
THEATRE-ROYAL,
Manchester.

WITH OBSERVATIONS ON A LATE PUBLICATION,
ENTITLED

"A Peep into the Theatre, &c."

Be ever in a just expression bold
Yet ne'er degrade fair satire to a scold;
Let no unworthy mein her form debase,
But let her smile, and let her frown with grace. POPE.



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Impartial Reflections, &c.

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That the inhabitants of the town of Manchester, and its vicinity have felt the insult offered to their taste, and understanding, by the managers of the theatre, having this season imposed on them a company of comedians so unworthy of their Patronage, is evident from their having so frequently performed to empty Houses.

It is certainly desirable, that the managers should be publicly informed of the causes, which have excited public displeasure, in doing which, praise should be bestowed where it is merited, as well as censure where it is deserved. The purport of these reflections is to counteract the evil, likely to arise from a pamphlet entitled, "*A Peep into the Theatre, &c.*" the writer of which appears, totally deficient in that moderation and candour which ought to influence the critic who writes to reform a public grievance. He should certainly allow every possible degree of praise, as encouragement to attempt deserving more, and point out, but not too severely censure, the faults he sees; a critique on the managers and performers written in such a spirit, might produce a reformation

in our theatre, advantageous to the managers and pleasing to the public. Any person writing from such motives would merit thanks, but we must suspect that author's motive, who lavishly bestows, (in scurrilous language) indiscriminate censure, illiberal reflection, falsehood, and personal abuse; who selects from a group of characters, the least objectionable, and subjects them to the severest invective, with scarcely an observation on their performance. Such an author will surely warrant the supposition that partiality guided his pen. The work alluded to appears to me more likely to increase than remove the evil complained of—for if success in many attempts, and having frequently obtained applause, will not excuse an actor for presuming to appear on the Manchester theatre, will not preserve him from scurrility and invective, nor from being held up to public disapprobation and ridicule, unless his abilities be equal to the first performers on the London boards, what inducement could any performer have to try his talents? who could hope to please such severe and fastidious critics? what manager could be found to act with liberality, if nothing short of the first rate abilities in the kingdom could insure him decent houses?

Rather let those who attempt to lead the taste and express the sense of the town, shew (what the conduct of the audience has often evinced) that they are reasonable in their expectations, judicious, and candid in their criticisms, sensible of injury, and steady in their resentment, then no managers would be so blind to their interest as to obtrude on the public, actors devoid of merit, nor would performers have the folly and impudence to assume the first line of acting, whose talents would scarcely qualify them for the lowest. I am induced from these considerations to endeavour to rescue some characters from the ill effects that might be produced by this author's unjust severity; in doing which I shall point out such circumstances as appear to me to merit ap-

probation, and prove as far as I am able, how ill this author is qualified to be the director of the public censure.

In the preface (for what is a book without a preface) we are told that the *managers* only, are to blame for bringing performers so devoid of merit, the performers are excused on the score of interest, &c., yet not one word is applied to the managers through the whole piece, except some slight observations on them as actors, and a general charge against Mr. Banks.

One fourth part of the book is taken up in telling the town what it well knew before, that Mrs. Ward as an actress soars far above mediocrity, and never fails to afford a great degree of pleasure, in every character she assumes. I would except those, which are evidently too young for her, and which nothing but the parsimony of the managers could make it necessary for her to take; her good sense renders it impossible that any thing but necessity could induce her to appear in such characters as Juliet, Angela, &c. I allow him no credit for the praise he has bestowed on Mrs. Ward, it is so evidently her due, that he need not have said so much.

His remarks on Mrs. Hatton do him more credit than any part of the book, he has allowed her *some* of the praise to which she is entitled; thus far our good natured critic has toiled through eight pages of panegyric and only once indulged himself in a sarcasm, but he seemed in haste to get to other game, where he might indulge his spleen; he did not care to abuse the ladies, and the moroseness of his wit not suffering him to dwell longer on what was praise-worthy, he chose to pass them over in silence.— It would have been but justice to have noticed Mrs. Powell, who contributes so much, to support almost every piece she appears in, by the able manner in which she performs the characters allotted her: a true

critic would rather encourage emulation and foster rising merit, than discountenance the timid and diffident.—Would it have been too much to have pointed out to Mrs. Kriveton some of the errors in her performance, and allowed her some degree of merit; her figure is certainly prepossessing, and would be engaging if she would attend to her attitude and acquire a more easy manner of disposing of her arms; in some characters she is highly interesting, and would be more so if she would pay as much attention to the business of the stage when others are speaking, as she does while speaking herself. In Amelia, in Lover's Vows, she evinces that degree of sensibility, enters into the character portrayed by the author, with that taste and judgment, and expresses it with such a degree of naïveté, as promises, with care and attention, to make her a valuable acquisition to our stage. I wish I could say as much for Mr. K. as a scene painter; it would be well if he would study nature, before he makes any more attempts.

Our grammatical satirist, after declaring bad as the company *are*, and making an exception a little in favour of Mrs. Hatton, proceeds most unmercifully to attack Mr. Young; with what degree of wit or propriety the public must judge: one *delicate* observation on an ill habit is all our elegant critic has deign'd to make on that gentleman's performance; he might have observed that some of his attitudes are ungraceful, that his ranting and extravagant actions in Rolla are totally incompatible with the character drawn by the poet, that he frequently betrays a want of taste and discernment in conceiving his author, that is truly astonishing in a person of a liberal education, and whose performance of Douglas, Hamlet, and some others, is so truly admirable: but no! not one criticism is to be found in the whole paragraph; yet the author displays in it such wonderful reasoning powers, that I must give it more consideration than I can bestow on any other. How does he make it

appear that Mr. Young thinks himself *a very great actor*, because he has *dined* once or twice in a respectable family? the limiting the number of dinners, and of his respectable friends, is a gross falsehood, and a mean insinuation, nor does his being the subject of a news-paper eulogium prove that *he* thinks himself a very great actor: for unless this author can make it appear that Mr. Y. wrote it himself, it proves nothing; and if he can, it only proves that he wishes others to think so, because a newspaper puff has ranked him with, or even above actors of a longer standing, and approved merit; does it follow that he possesses no merit at all? or is it denied him because he is not six feet high? Our excellent observer elegantly ridicules the exertions Mr. Young is obliged to make, to overcome an impediment in his speech, and which he surmounts on the stage much to the credit of his understanding and industry, and which proves his earnest desire to please: it may be easily conceived that a man may twist himself and make ugly faces when in the pains our author mentions, but I cannot conceive how a man can be seen on the stage or any where else *twisting his guts*; the concluding sentence but one is a finished piece of argument, and the last as truly grammatical.

“Although his acting is so wretched, why will he attempt such a part as Rolla?” If he had proved his acting so very wretched, it would have been immaterial which part he played, for he would have been ridiculous in all; but had he allowed him sufficient abilities even to have played in livery, he might have raised an argument, by saying although his abilities *may* qualify him for a messenger, why will he attempt that for which he is totally unfit; but as it stands it has neither sense nor meaning. “Why gull the town with such contemptuous stuff,” perhaps he meant to say contemptible. Mr. Young certainly possesses abilities, which when improved

by observation and practice cannot fail to make him very respectable in a middle line of acting, and enable him to perform many principal characters with credit to himself: it is the managers' fault, not Mr. Young's that he takes characters for which he is unfit.

Had not the managers' illiberality and ill judged parsimony deprived us of Cooke, or Raymond, we ought certainly to have been grateful to them for engaging so valuable an addition as Mr. Young: but to bring him forward in their stead, before his talents are matured, is an insult the town of Manchester does not deserve, nor will it tamely submit to.

Our critic's modesty is as apparent as his wit; he tells the town that the applauses so frequently bestowed on Mr. Young, are all unmerited: his criticisms are so just, I suppose the whole town will be convinced they were fools and gulls.

The same observation applies to Mr. Turpin, who for four seasons has frequently received unanimous applause from crowded houses; the author seems to have been aware of that circumstance, and that the town would certainly recollect that they had frequently seen Mr. Turpin with pleasure; to endeavour to deprive him of that pleasing reflection, this writer insinuates that all the plaudits given when he performed, were meant for the author, not the actor; it is easy to place the plaudits of the audience to that account, but it should be remembered that an author will not meet with applause in the theatre, whatever he may do in the closet, if the actor does not express his sentiments, and speak his language: a just criticism pointing out those faults for which he deserves such unmerciful abuse, might have had some weight, and might have convinced the town it was

completely gull'd: but as not one single charge is brought against him, not one observation on his performance that affects his credit, it is to be hoped the town will hold over his head the protecting shield of their favour, and not suffer him to fall by the stiletto of an assassin.

Had Mr. Turpin obtruded himself as a first-rate actor, and refused parts in an inferior line, he might have been properly charged with vanity; but when he comes cheerfully forward in any character which the interest of the piece requires, with unremitting and unwearied industry exerts his talents, he is certainly entitled to the slight degree of praise that is due to humility: nothing can be more illiberal, illnatur'd, and irrelevant, than our author's observations on this performer: abuse and falsehood make up the whole, not one criticism from beginning to end. Mr. T. certainly merits public approbation for keeping constantly in mind the respect which is due from a candidate for their favour, by never appearing before them disqualified for the business he has to perform: he is always correct and perfect, and his dress uniformly appropriate; I believe few will agree with the writer, that in Frank Oatland he delivers his motley dialect, in an insignificant, unfeeling manner; on the contrary, he looks, and acts, and speaks, the honest affectionate, generous hearted, simple rustic, the author meant to exhibit, and none but a fastidious critic can find fault, with his imitations of a country dialect; his performance of Plethora, is generally allowed to possess a considerable degree of merit. Upon the whole, if managers are to be censured for bringing forward Mr. T. in his line, and such an actor to be discouraged, we must in vain expect a company of comedians.

Messrs. Ward, Penson, and Grist, it is obliquely hinted deserve some merit from having performed on other stages; what has the audience to do with that? their concern is with the actor as he is, not as he was.—

Our author having professedly undertaken to censure the managers, I am surprised he says so little about Mr. Ward; that gentleman well knows that as an actor he is an universal favourite, and that the interest of the piece is always considered as being much strengthened whenever he *condescends* to perform: yet such is his indifference whether the town is pleased or not, such his contempt of a public that has generously supported him, that he rarely favours us with his exertions; how very different is his conduct in what concerns himself, from that which concerns his wife. His parsimony and envy deprived us of Jones, a promising actor, and one whose loss must be regretted: for Mr. Ward does not make up the deficiency by his personal exertions as Mrs. Ward does, who supplies the want of an assistant in her line by unceasing industry; when Mr. Ward next presumes to ask for a benefit, his liberality and industry will not I conceive go unrewarded.

Our author's observations on Mr. Banks are of a piece with the rest, illiberal, and nothing to the purpose: as an actor he is respectable, and we are pleased to see him in such characters as Old Dornton, in the Road to Ruin; as a manager he takes his share of public disapprobation.

Having cast in my mite towards forwarding the benevolent purpose of relieving some characters from the possible consequences of (what appeared to me) unjust and illiberal abuse, tending only to hurt the feelings, and damp the spirit of emulation in persons we have often seen with pleasure, I shall conclude with observing, that had the author written a liberal and candid criticism on the performers, and a just censure on the conduct of the managers, I should not have thought it necessary to have made any reflections on his



book, or called the public attention to the merits of the performers; nothing but a wish to do good, and counteract evil, could have induced an address to the public from

CANDID.



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